



# STATE OF THE RIVER 2001

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## RIVER PROFILE

The 310-mile long St. Johns River and its tributaries drain about 1/6 of the state of Florida or about 8,700 square miles. The St. Johns begins as a broad marsh at its headwaters southwest of Cape Canaveral, evolving into a series of lakes as the river broadens and flows east and north of Orlando. Hence, its original name among Native Americans was Welaka, or River of Lakes. At Palatka, the St. Johns matures into its true size and shape, averaging two miles in width for its final one hundred mile journey through Florida's largest city, Jacksonville, where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean.



*Mission: "To recognize and celebrate the importance of the St. Johns River and to unite local, federal, state, and community partners in the entire St. Johns River Basin to implement vital historic, cultural, environmental, recreation, and economic initiatives."*

*Vision: "We will unite diverse interests, focus on shared goals, and garner new resources that will enhance our river environment and its communities."*

The upper reaches of the river contain over 280,000 acres of publicly-owned land. Many of the public lands protect the headwaters of the river, home to the endangered Snail Kite and Wood Stork. The Upper Basin Stick Marsh has for many years been one of the premier fresh-water fishing areas in the nation. The middle portions of the river include major tributaries such as the Wekiva River, the Econlockhatchee River, and major springs such as Blue Springs, Salt Springs, and Silver Springs, one of Florida's largest. The Wekiva and Econlockhatchee are designated as outstanding Florida Waterways. In the lower basin, saltwater enters the river at its mouth in Jacksonville. In periods of low water, tides may cause a reverse flow as far south as Lake Monroe, 161 miles upstream from the river's mouth. The Lower Basin is of national importance, as a layover and wintering area for migratory waterfowl, as well as home to the second largest Atlantic fleet in the United States Navy.

The first Floridians, pre-historic Native Americans, are believed to have lived along and near the river for thousands of years. The northeast portion of the basin is home to some of Florida's most significant cultural and historic resources including some of the continent's earliest military installations such as St. Augustine's Fort Matanzas and Fort Caroline in Jacksonville. After the Revolutionary War, Florida and the St. Johns became part of the United States. Jacksonville was established in 1832 under the name of Cow Ford, because at one point the river was shallow enough that settlers could have their cattle "ford" or cross the river. Kingsley Plantation, located on Ft. George Island near the mouth of the river and established in the 1700s, is a national historic site. After the Civil War, the St. Johns became a tourist attraction as steamboats brought tourists on excursions from Charleston and Savannah. During World Wars I and II, shipbuilding in support of the U.S. Navy was a major industry along the St. Johns. The wide breadth of river in southern Jacksonville served as a major port for seaplanes during World War II.



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## COMMUNITY-BASED PROCESS

The AHRI is managed by a Steering Committee consists of the following stakeholders: the Executive Director of the St. Johns River Water Management District, the Directors of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Northeast Florida District and Central Florida District, the Mayor of the City of Jacksonville (principal nominator of the St. Johns River application for the AHRI), a representative from each of the Advisory Committees, and representatives from the river community.

Three Advisory Committees representing the three basins of the river -- Lower, Middle and Upper, support the Steering Committee. These committees identify needs and priorities for their respective portions of the river. Membership of these advisory committees is determined through a locally-led process, beginning with local government officials, and include representatives from the environmental community, business community, tourism community, agricultural community, recreational interests, historic/cultural interests and citizens from the respective areas.

A number of federal agencies are partners in the AHRI on the St. Johns River. These include the Department of Agriculture (Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Rural Development), Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration), Department of Defense (Army Corps of Engineers), Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of the Interior (National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey), the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Small Business Administration. These agencies have agreed to provide technical assistance as appropriate, and to assist in identifying federal funding opportunities to support projects along the river.



*The St. Johns River Eco-Heritage Corridor will celebrate the cultural, historical, natural and outdoor recreational significance of the St. Johns River.*

*Goals of the corridor include:*

- *Identify a land-based corridor and a river-based "blueway" to allow residents and visitors to easily discover centuries of history, southern lifestyle, wildlife and the natural beauty of the surrounding landscapes.*
- *Create materials that identify and interpret the corridor.*
- *Enhance eco-heritage, outdoor recreation, and nature-based tourism within the St. Johns River watershed to provide economic growth and opportunity for the entire region while protecting area resources and community lifestyles*
- *Create regional identity*

## Accomplishments and Resources Leveraged

A very important success of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative along the St. Johns River is the development of a river-wide network. Stakeholders representing county governments, cities, citizen groups, business organizations and recreation supporters from the length of the river are meeting, and discussing issues of concern to the river. This fact is often cited as one of the major benefits to arise from the AHR designation.

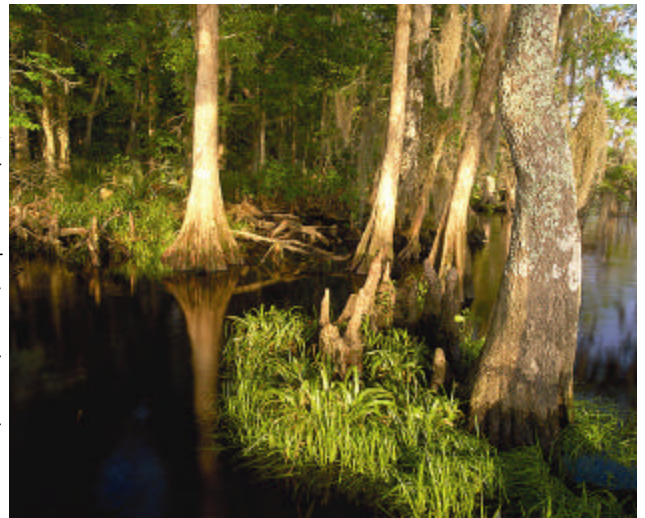
Support for the River Navigator position comes from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the River Navigator is stationed in Washington, DC.

Two projects were selected as "keystone projects" for special focus in the year 2000:

- *St. Johns River Eco-Heritage Corridor.* A conceptual corridor being developed along the entire length of the river to celebrate the cultural, historical, natural and outdoor recreational significance of the St. Johns River.
- *The Preservation Project, Jacksonville.* A project to manage growth in the City of Jacksonville through acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, in partnership with state, federal and private partners.

Funding has been received and partnerships have been established for several projects:

- ◆ *Monitoring of the Lower St. Johns River.* \$240,000 from the US Geological Survey for monitoring to study water quality in sanitary nuisance areas where there were failing septic tanks.
- ◆ *Timucuan Land Acquisition.* \$2 million from the National Park Service for land acquisition of critical parcels within the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, particularly uplands most threatened by development. \$3 million from the City of Jacksonville will match these funds.
- ◆ *Preservation Project.* \$150,000 for land acquisition to support the Preservation Project and flood control efforts in Jacksonville, from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- ◆ *Volusia Trace/Trail.* Technical support from the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program is being provided to develop a master plan to connect and network the county's Environmental, Cultural, Heritage and Outdoor Recreation (ECHO) assets.
- ◆ *Hogan's Creek Greenway Restoration.* The Corps of Engineers is developing a Preliminary Restoration Plan, the first step in the restoration process, in cooperation with the city of Jacksonville.
- ◆ *Lake George Restoration.* The Fish and Wildlife Service is providing funds to support controlled burns to control invasive and exotic vegetation.
- ◆ *St. Johns River Eco-Heritage Corridor.* The Environmental Protection Agency is providing support to fund a half-time project manager for the corridor. Camp, Dresser and McGee, Inc., is providing *pro bono* resources to create a web site for the corridor.





# Future Challenges

The communities along the St. Johns River look forward to continuing to build partnerships and develop projects to enhance the river and its communities. The following actions will assist the St. Johns River AHR Initiative to reach its full potential:

- Secure continued assistance in accessing federal administrators and federal agency programs that support the AHRI objectives
- Increase commitment to the AHRI at all partnership levels
- Restructure/revitalize AHR committees to focus on key projects through implementation
- Develop new and innovative partnerships with non-traditional partners.
- Obtain administrative or capacity building support for the St. Johns River Navigator in order to fulfill expectations of community partners and facilitate efforts required to deliver priority projects
- Secure funding for implementation of keystone projects
- Secure funding for other priority projects including water quality improvement and recreational development
- Provide full funding for existing programs that support the objectives of AHRI

## Priority Areas for the St. Johns River

- Acquisition and preservation of environmentally sensitive lands
- Improvement of water quality (storm water retrofits and septic tank connections)
- Recreational development (hiking trails, park improvements, and boating access)
- Environmental restoration and protection
- Development of cultural and environmental sites and learning centers

